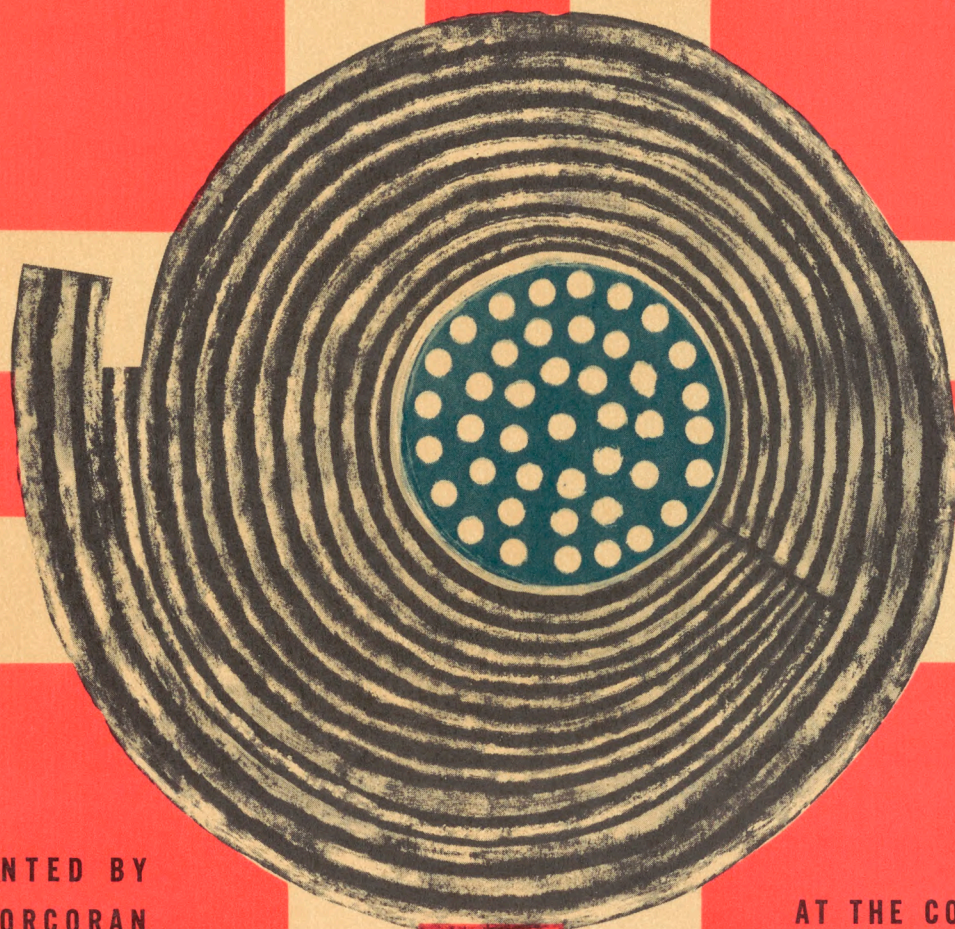


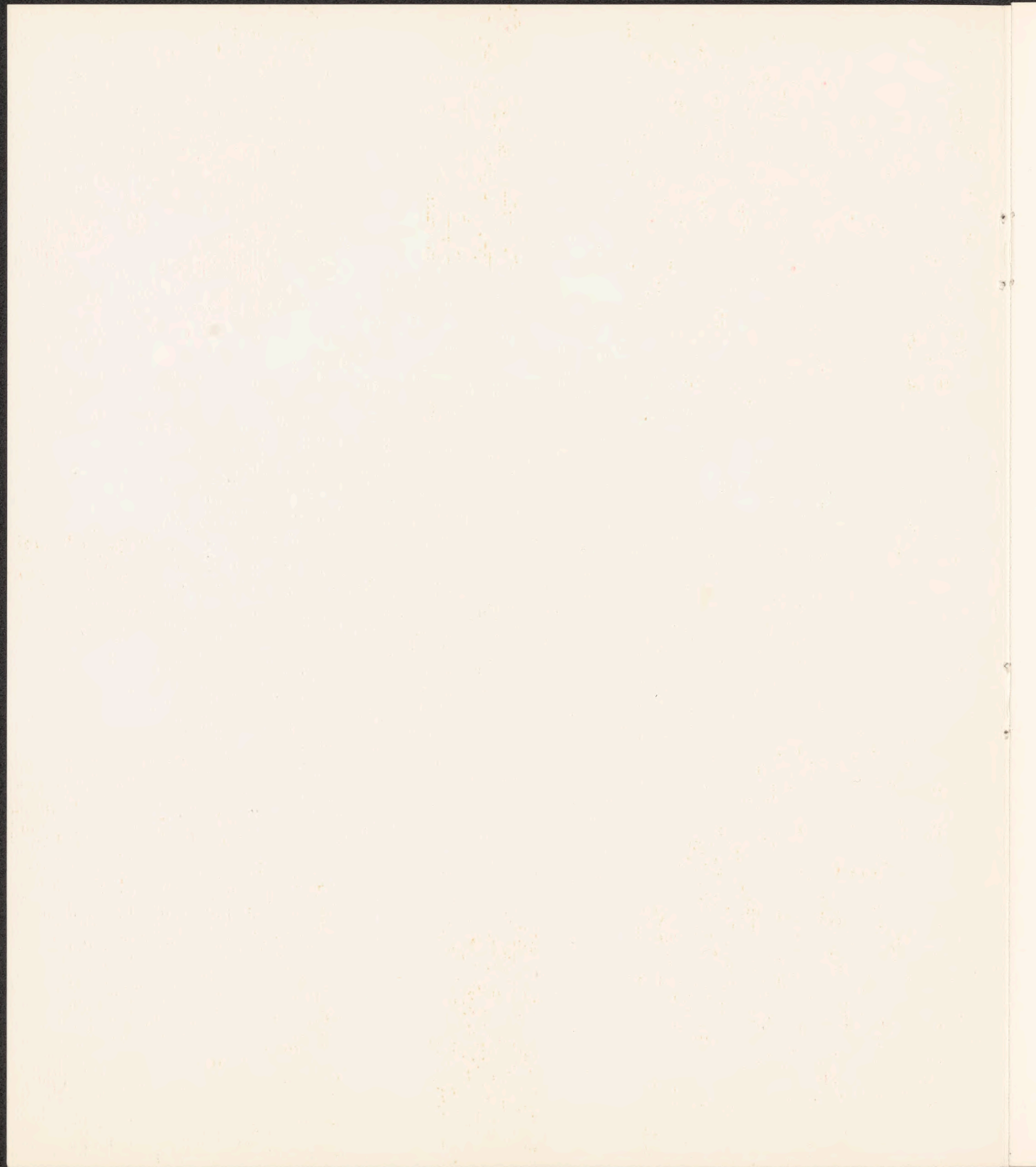
P O N C E D E L E O N



PRESENTED BY
THE CORCORAN
GALLERY OF ART
AND THE
WASHINGTON
PRINT CLUB

AT THE CORCORAN
GALLERY OF ART
WASHINGTON D C

NOV 6-DEC 11 1966



FOREWORD

Washington's oldest center for the visual arts, *The Corcoran Gallery of Art*, joins with Washington's newest, *The Washington Print Club*, to inaugurate this series of one-man exhibitions by eminent American printmakers. The purpose of the series is to show, in depth, the spectacular creativity and inventiveness of the art of printmaking in the United States today.

The traditional boundaries between prints, paintings and sculpture are becoming blurred. In their vastly increased size and color range, modern prints have taken on some of the historical characteristics of painting. Some intaglio prints, such as Ponce de Leon's, have tactile qualities which are very sculptural. At the same time many American artists feel quite free to move between painting and printmaking, bringing to each medium insights gained from the other. From this welding of traditionally separate art forms there may be emerging a significant new form of incalculable importance.

For their considerable work in organizing this first exhibition, we express our gratitude to Mrs. Robert C. Zimmer, a trustee of The Print Club, and staff members of The Corcoran Gallery.

HERMANN WARNER WILLIAMS, JR.

Director

The Corcoran Gallery of Art

TIM BORNSTEIN

President

The Washington Print Club

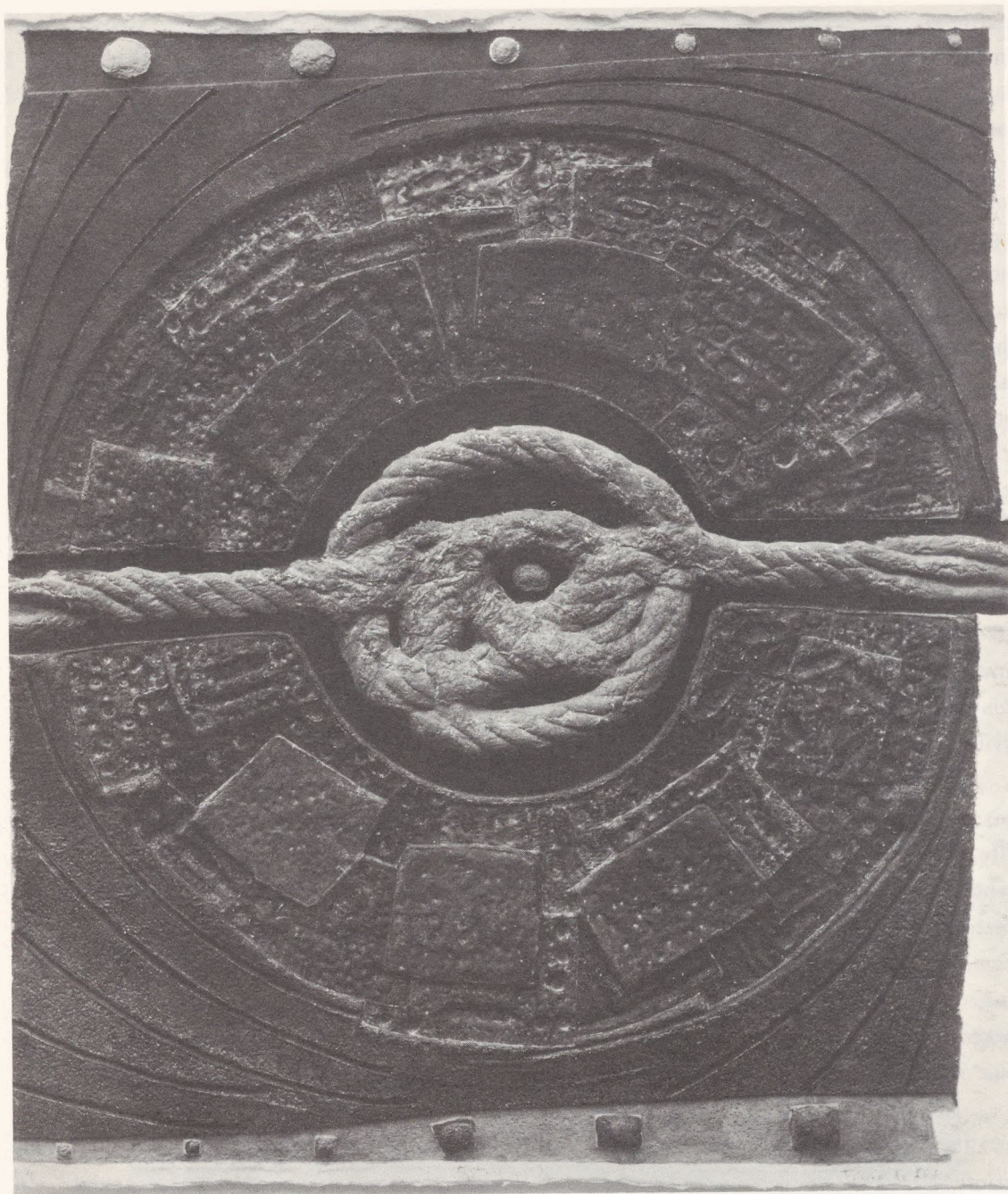
MICHAEL PONCE DE LEON

Printmaking has taken on new life in recent years. Artists have lost their suspicion of the print as a limited product that would restrict their creativity. They have found it just as responsive as any other art form, and, moreover, a stimulus to arriving at unforeseen results. The printed image, after all, comes as a surprise to artists who have worked on the plates, stones, and screens. Exploration in terms of craft is perhaps best satisfied in printmaking, which, if desired, can combine elements of painting, engraving, and sculpture in a single printed image.

Michael Ponce de Leon is probably the leading figure in the new tendency to use the resources of other media in printmaking. It is doubtful that any other graphic artist has given the old conception of the print such a drastic overhauling. He recognizes that the print is a transfer from one surface to another. But he knows that the master surface does not have to be flat: it can exist in several layers which, when inked and printed on a heavy paper, can result in an embossed image. In pursuit of this idea he has developed the metal collage intaglio in which he welds to the plate, in his words, "... a complex of shapes of varying thicknesses to create a pulsing interaction in depth. While constructing this bas-relief I feel a closer kinship to the sculptor than to the printmaker or the painter . . .". In this process the artist incorporates real objects because he wants a reflection of everyday living embedded in an abstract setting.

There is little doubt that Ponce de Leon goes through more complicated operations than any other printmaker past or present. For *Entrapment* (1965) the heaviest grade of rope was cast in metal by the lost wax process. This part, which weighs thirty pounds and is one and a quarter inches thick, was combined on a plate with 63 other pieces of metal cut into shapes with a jeweler's saw and fitted together like a jigsaw puzzle. Lower levels were welded to the plate. Each section was inked separately with specially mixed inks to create transparencies and opacities. It takes the artist three and a half hours to ink this plate, which is then printed on a powerful hydraulic press exerting 10,000 pounds of pressure per square inch. The paper, which is a quarter of an inch thick, is made especially for him by the master papermaker Douglass Howell. It has long linen fibers that can stretch sufficiently to form a deep mold. The artist is quick to acknowledge his appreciation of Howell's contribution, which he considers important to his work.

Ponce de Leon limits editions of his prints to ten. This decision is counter to a hallowed tradition which conceives the print as a multiple but identical original to be produced in a



ENTRAPMENT — COLLAGE-INTAGLIO

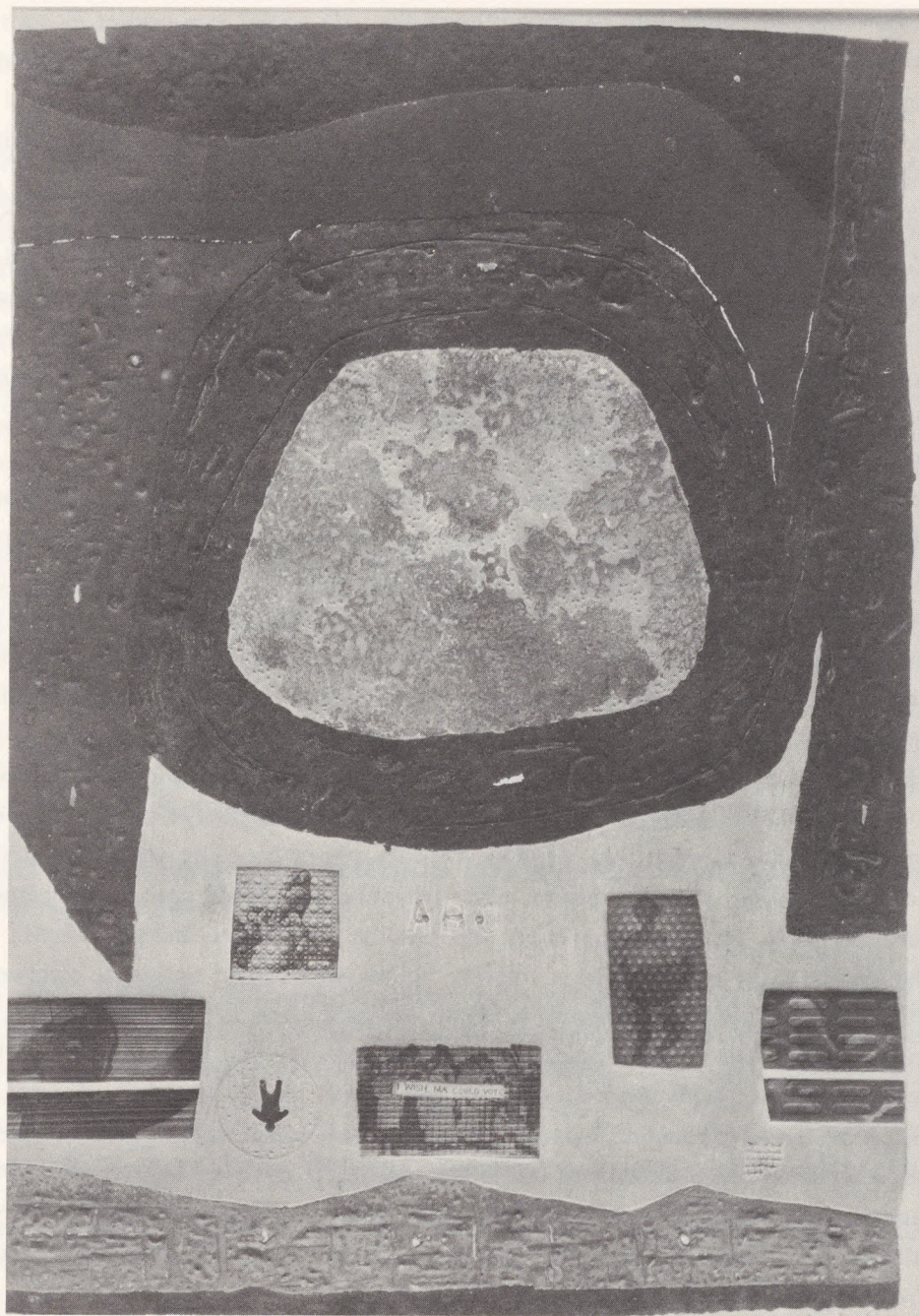
fairly sizeable edition. But Ponce de Leon feels that his prints, because of the extensive hand manipulation required for their production, cannot be equated to traditional examples. "If I were to print in large quantities," he says, "I would have to use mass culture means and would arrive at mass results."

Ponce de Leon does not work exclusively in intaglio. He is also fond of the flat surface of the lithograph stone, which can yield another quality of impression. Here, too, he has introduced collage. In *Mundigrana* (1963) he has incorporated transfers of photographs, coins, strings, tarlatan, a Spanish newspaper matrix, a feather, an egg crate, and other objects. The technical inventiveness required to fix these images on a stone is formidable. It is clear that his interest in the texture and shape of battered commonplace objects amounts to a passion, and it is this total involvement in his material that gives his work its drama. More, it gives it its poetry. Ponce de Leon, the master craftsman, is also somewhat of a mystic. It is a tiresome cliché that the visionary artist is a technical innocent. More often it is the reverse—he is fascinated by his craft, as in the instances of Blake, Palmer, Bresdin, Meryon and Redon.

For all his technical involvement Ponce de Leon is therefore basically an intuitive artist, and the extraordinary richness and subtlety of his colors, somehow Moorish, are reflections of a mind that is engaged with magic. "While making prints," he says, "I feel a closer kinship to the fetish of witch doctors than to the sophisticated approach of some artists." He is deeply involved with music, and believes his work is dominated by the sound of the guitar. He *hears* his colors as separate plucked notes (hence his love of collage) which must fit into a satisfying but not predictable sequence.

Ponce de Leon was born in Miami, Florida, in 1922. He lost both parents on the day of his birth, and shortly thereafter was taken to Mexico, where he spent the early part of his life. He has vivid memories of Mexican forms such as cactus, hot suns, and stone calendars, which have found their way into his work. At the age of nineteen he came to the United States, served in the army, then studied in New York City at the National Academy of Design, the Art Students League, and the Brooklyn Museum School. During this extensive schooling, which took place between 1947 and 1952, he produced cartoons for the American Legion magazine. The cartoons, which he now sees as collages, combined inked silhouettes with open line work and ben-day areas.

At the Brooklyn Museum he studied printmaking with Gabor Peterdi. At the time (1951-1952) Ponce de Leon was painting prolifically and was particularly interested in doing color prints. He used so many colors that Peterdi said to him in exasperation: "Painter, paint." In 1953 he visited the Contemporaries, later to become the Pratt Graphic Art Center. There



HERITAGE — COLLAGE-INTAGLIO

Margaret Lowengrund taught him to print lithographs. He served as a printer in both lithography and intaglio and printed plates and stones for such artists as David Smith, Kurt Seligmann, and Ben-Zion, and for such organizations as the International Graphic Arts Society (I. G. A. S.). The brilliance and complexity of his present work is therefore no accident: it is based upon years of solid experience in the resources of printmaking.

A Fulbright fellowship from 1956 to 1958 enabled Ponce de Leon to go to Norway. There he met the great Rolf Nesch, who from the mid-1930s had been making intaglio prints from plates on which pieces of metal were soldered. Nesch, who saw that Ponce de Leon was working in the same direction, insisted that the American stay and work with him. Ponce de Leon has fond memories of that modest artist. Both profited from their association since each had different ideas on the range of intaglio collage. After a month Ponce de Leon left, despite Nesch's protests, to carry on his travels.

When he returned to the United States he continued to develop collage ideas, now stimulated by the electronic music of Varese, whom he met several times. He produced, among other examples, such extraordinary pieces as *Vernal Equinox* (1959), *Enchanted Mountain* (1959), and *Wounded Mountain* (1960). In 1961 he began to experiment with transferred pictures from newspaper halftone mats, and in 1962 created *Heritage*, which is probably the first print or painting to include transferred photographs. These images, isolated from their familiar context, seem almost classical against a background of navy blue, purple and orange.

As Ponce de Leon's ideas expanded his plates became more complex and multileveled. *Echo 7359402* (1962), which features a seven-cent airmail stamp, is a combination of light and heavy castings, and *Counter-trust* (1965), with its tugs of opposing arrows, is multileveled in such complex fashion that any printer aside from the artist could not put it together without a blueprint. Both plates are very heavy and measure about three inches in depth.

Although the artist is essentially a colorist, he has also turned out more somber works. These often have a humanistic implication. *Birth of the Cross* (1962), for example, a large vertical triptych, has a blood-red running down a black expanse. But in most of his work drama is surprisingly combined with felicity. Large violent forms appear in colors of great distinction, which have the tenderness of hues that have survived from antiquity. Halftones, hardware, and other objects are sometimes embedded, but they serve to lighten the severity of designs and to give the prints the feeling of being stamped, of having suffered great pressure. This quality in the intaglio print, which has always existed in simple form, has taken on a new and exciting dimension in Ponce de Leon's hands.

JACOB KAINEN

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

PERSONAL DATA: Born Miami, Florida, July 4, 1922. Educated at University of Mexico, National Academy of Design, Art Students League, Brooklyn Museum School and in Europe. Served on the faculty of Vassar College, 1953. Currently teaching at Pratt Graphic Arts Center, Hunter College, Cooper Union, Art Students League, and The University of Pennsylvania.

EXHIBITIONS: Represented in many group exhibitions including the Museum of Modern Art, Jewish Museum, Chicago Art Institute, National Gallery of Art, Library of Congress, Smithsonian Institution, The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and Ljubljana Biennials, Yugoslavia.

Exhibited at The White House and in many U.S. embassies and countries abroad under the auspices of the State Department and the USIA, respectively.

Given six one-man exhibitions in the United States and other countries.

COLLECTIONS: Represented in twenty-three public collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Brooklyn Museum, National Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Library of Congress, and Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Represented in many private collections including those of Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Mrs. John F. Kennedy.

HONORS AND PRIZES: Tiffany Fellowships, 1953, 1955; Fulbright Grants, 1956-1958; Oakland Art Museum, Gold Medal; Audubon Artists Society, Medal of Honor and Audubon Medal; Society of American Graphic Artists, Henry B. Shope Prize; Pennsylvania Academy of Design, Alice McFadden Eyre Medal, 1965; thirty-one purchase prizes including those from the Brooklyn Museum, Potsdam University, Bradley University, Dallas Art Museum, Oklahoma Art Museum and Philadelphia Print Club.

Invited to design a postage stamp honoring the Fine Arts for the United States Post Office, 1964.

Invited to visit Yugoslavia on a USIA cultural exchange program, 1965.

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

PRINTS

1. Abduction of the Moon	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1960
2. The Oracle	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1960
3. Apotheosis	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1961
4. Phoenix	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1961
5. Heritage	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1962
6. Chrysalis	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1962
7. Birth of the Cross	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1962
8. Samsara	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1962
9. Terminus	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1962
10. Archetype	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1962
11. Maelstrom	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1963
12. Omen	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1963
13. Genesis	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1963
14. Forever and Never	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1963
15. Nude	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1964
16. Mundigrama II	<i>lithograph-collage</i>	1964
17. Goddess	<i>lithograph-relievo</i>	1965
18. Entrapment	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1965
19. Reverberations	<i>lithograph-collage</i>	1965
20. Counter-trust	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1965
21. Eternally Yours	<i>paper cast</i>	1966
22. Succubus	<i>collage-intaglio</i>	1966

PLATES AND STUDIES

23. Birth of the Cross	<i>plate for lower third</i>	1962
24. Omen	<i>plate</i>	1963
25. Ono	<i>plate (never printed)</i>	1964
26. Entrapment	<i>cardboard study</i>	1965
27. Entrapment	<i>lead study</i>	1965
28. Entrapment	<i>print study</i>	1965
29. Eternally Yours	<i>plate</i>	1966
30. Succubus	<i>wood model for casting plate</i>	1966



